DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 150 673 95 EA 010 197

| | |
|---|---|
| TITLE | School Climate. Research Action Brief Number 4. |
| INSTITUTION | Oregon Univ., Eugene. ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management. |
| SPONS AGENCY | National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. |
| PUB DATE | Feb 78 |
| CONTRACT | 400-78-0007 |
| NOTE | 5p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403 (free) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Administrator Role; *Educational Environment; *Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Leadership; *Literature Reviews; *Morale; *Organizational Climate; School Administration; School Environment; Teacher Attitudes |

ABSTRACT

Even though educators and researchers agree that school climate is important, questions exist in two major areas. First, what actually constitutes school climate, and, second, can research indicate in concrete, useful terms what impact school climate has on morale and productivity and, conversely, what effects leader behavior and other organizational factors have on school climate? The author describes Halpin and Croft's seminal research on organizational climate and the development of their Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ) and then reviews two other studies attempting to use the OCDQ as a measure of different aspects of school climate. The results were inconclusive, indicating that researchers have yet to develop a prescriptive measure of school climate. The author also reviews sample pragmatic, administrator-generated approaches to climate improvement, pointing out that these approaches also fail to do anything but describe climate. (Author)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED150673

ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

# RESEARCH ACTION BRIEF

Number 4 February 1978

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

EA 010 197

Each *Research Action Brief* reports the findings of significant empirical research studies on a topic in educational management. From these findings implications are drawn for the operation of today's schools, thus serving as a guide for enlightened administrative action.

## School Climate

Practitioners and researchers alike agree that school climate is important. Administrators and teachers acknowledge its importance when they speak of boosting morale, increasing involvement, and, in general, maximizing job satisfaction and productivity. Researchers have acknowledged its importance by conducting a multitude of studies intended to indicate the impact of school climate on job satisfaction and productivity and to delineate the relationship between leadership style and organizational climate.

Practitioners and researchers generally agree that some school climates are good and some are bad. Some schools provide teachers and administrators with feelings of accomplishment, both with the tasks they perform and with the interpersonal relations they experience. In others, teachers and administrators are demoralized and apathetic.

Despite this consensus, major questions exist in two primary areas. First, what actually constitutes school climate? Second, can research indicate in concrete, useful terms what impact school climate has on morale and productivity, and, conversely, what effects leader behavior and other organizational factors have on school climate?

As we shall see, the difficulty researchers face in answering the second question arises directly from the first. The problem is basically a conceptual one. School climate has been ***described*** in a variety of ways: typologies and classification systems have been devised. But descriptions of school climate cannot tell school administrators what to do or not do to improve climate.

In this examination of the research, we will review Halpin and Croft's seminal research on school climate and look briefly at other researchers' attempts to utilize Halpin and Croft's Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire (OCDQ). Finally, we will briefly examine some of the literature intended for use by practitioners, which is not necessarily based on research, but is intended to assist administrators in improving school climate.

### The OCDQ

The major impetus for Halpin and Croft's research on organizational climate came, as Halpin states, from their observation that "schools differed from each other in their 'feel'." These researchers conceived of the organizational climate of a school as analogous to the personality of an individual. This concept allowed them to avoid the vague and generalized way in which "morale" had been used in previous research to describe the "feel" of organizations.

Halpin and Croft examined elementary schools in the development of their OCDQ. They collected data from seventy-one schools in six different regions of the country, with climate descriptions from 1,151 respondents.

The items composing this questionnaire were selected for their ability to indicate consistencies in faculty members' perceptions within their schools and to allow for comparisons

among different schools. From teachers' descriptions of their school experiences and from previous research, Halpin and Croft constructed a set of simple statements, such as "Teachers seek special favors from the principal," and "The principal schedules the work for the teachers." Respondents indicated to what extent these statements applied to their schools.

After certain refinements, the sixty-four item OCDQ was divided into eight subtests; four of these tapped the characteristics of the faculty as a group, and the other four pertained to characteristics of the principal as leader. The group behavior subtests were intended to measure ***disengagement*** (teachers' tendency toward anomie), ***hindrance*** (Do the teachers feel the principal facilitates or hinders their work?), ***esprit*** (teachers' morale), and ***intimacy*** (social needs satisfaction).

The leader behavior subtests were intended to measure ***aloofness*** (Is the principal impersonal and formal, or emotionally involved with his staff?), ***production emphasis*** (Is the principal highly directive and not sensitive to staff feedback?), ***thrust*** (Does the principal motivate teachers by setting a good example and personally moving the organization?), and ***consideration*** (Does the principal treat teachers "humanly"?).

Of these eight characteristics, Halpin and Croft discovered that esprit and thrust possessed special significance. The combined OCDQ scores for these two characteristics is "the best single index of authenticity," as Halpin states. Esprit indicates the authenticity of group behavior, while thrust indicates the same for the principal's behavior. Halpin conceived of authentic behavior as reality-centered, open, and essentially honest. And his data indicate that authenticity is strongly associated with those organizational climates he and Croft class as "open."

Halpin and Croft discovered that the organizational profiles of their seventy-one elementary schools could be arrayed along a continuum from "open climate" at one end through "closed climate" at the other.

In the open climate, as Halpin describes it, members experience high esprit, but have no need for a high degree of intimacy. The leader scores high on thrust, but does not have to emphasize production, since the teachers' productivity is already high. The behavior of both leader and group is "authentic." At the other end of the spectrum, the closed climate is "the least genuine" one. What the leader says and does are two separate things. Teachers are disengaged, esprit is low, and group achievement is minimal.

Halpin and Croft are careful to point out that their continuum, while it is useful for purposes of classification and convenience, has certain shortcomings. As Halpin notes, "the ranking schema is, at best, only an approximation, and the use of a continuum—which, perforce, assumes a linearity of relationship—oversimplifies the facts." He acknowledges that, even though the six climate types were predicated on the research, "In a genuine sense we did not discover these Organizational Climates; we ***invented*** them."

What Halpin and Croft invented was a language to describe climate as multidimensional. Their typology represented a major improvement over the unidimensional concept of "morale" employed by previous researchers. But, even a multidimensional concept of climate has its limitations.

### Research Using the OCDQ

In the years since Halpin and Croft devised their OCDQ, it has been utilized in a variety of research studies examining different aspects of organizational climate, specifically, of school climate. Although other researchers have devised other measures of organizational climate, the majority of the research on school climate seems to have involved the use of the OCDQ. It is for this reason that we here examine two such studies—one investigating principal's behavior and school climate, and one seeking to discover changes in school climate over time. These studies are representative of both the subjects investigated and the generally inconclusive results obtained by the OCDQ.

In his attempt to ascertain the relation between principals' behavior and school climate, Wiggins hypothesized that statistically significant relationships existed between three aspects of school principals' behavior ("interpersonal orientation, organizational orientation, and interpersonal values,") and


**References**

1. Halpin, Andrew W. "The Organizational Climate of Schools." Chapter 4 in *Theory and Research in Administration*, pp. 131-249. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966.
2. Halpin, Andrew W., and Croft, Don B. *The Organizational Climate of Schools*. St. Louis: Washington University, 1962. 199 pages. ED 002 897.
3. Lindstrom, Robert J. "Between Cliff-Hanger and Climax." *Thrust For Educational Leadership*, 7, 2 (November 1977), pp. 6-7, 14.
4. Shaheen, Thomas A., and Pedrick, W. Roberts. *School District Climate Improvement: A Challenge to the School Superintendent*. Denver: CFK Ltd., 1974. 154 pages. ED 105 605.
5. Walden, John C., Taylor, Thomas N., and Watkins, J. Foster. "Organizational Climate Changes over Time." *Educational Forum*, 40, 1 (November 1975), pp. 87-93. EJ 133 956.
6. Wiggins, Thomas W. "A Comparative Investigation of Principal Behavior and School Climate." *The Journal of Educational Research*, 66, 3 (November 1972), pp. 103-105.


**Order copies of numbered items from sources below. Do not order from the Clearinghouse.**

1. This title is out-of-print and is not available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS).
2. ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS), P. O. Box 190, Arlington, VA 22210 in (MF) microfiche or (HC) paper copy reproduction. Payment must accompany orders of less than $10.00, check or money order payable to EDRS. Specify ED 002 897. MF $0.83 HC $10.03. Plus postage, MF $0.13 HC $0.52.
3. Association of California School Administrators, 1575 Old Bayshore Hwy., Burlingame, CA 94010. Single copy of Nov. 1977 issue, $2.50.
4. Nueva Day Care and Learning Center, CFK, Ltd. Publications, 6565 Skyline Blvd., Hillsborough, CA 94010. $4.00.
5. Box A, West Lafayette, IN 47906. Single copy of Nov. 1975 issue, $1.75.
6. Heldref Publications, 4000 Albemarle St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016. Single copy of Nov. 1972 issue, $3.00.

"teacher-principal interaction" (school climate as defined by the OCDQ).

Using appropriate measurement instruments for the three aspects of principals' behavior, as well as the OCDQ, Wiggins collected data from thirty-five randomly selected elementary schools in "one large urban school district in Southern California." Approximately 715 teachers and principals participated in his study. Wiggins retested thirteen of the original schools after eight months to examine the effects of "the length of a principal's incumbency in a school upon his behavior and perceptions of the organizational climate," and the effects of the replacement of the principal on the school climate.

Contrary to Wiggins' expectations, principal behavior and organizational climate generally were not shown to be significantly related. One plausible explanation for this absence of support lies, Wiggins believed, in the nature of the OCDQ itself. This instrument primarily measures teachers' perceptions of climate and principal behavior. He discovered that when the data were reprocessed to eliminate the teachers' perceptions, the significance of the relationship between climate and principal behavior increased, as one might well expect. In Wiggins' study, as in others, discrepancies exist between the way in which teachers view the school environment and the way in which the principal perceives it.

Even though Wiggins' major hypothesis was not substantiated, his data did "clearly indicate the presence of a compelling organizational climate stability." He discovered that school climates did not change when principals were replaced. Moreover, as the length of the principal's incumbency increased, his or her behavior tended to become "more significantly related to the organizational climate," whether the climate was open or closed. In other words, instead of a balanced interaction between environment and personality, the principals in Wiggins' study were "socialized" by their organizations.

Wiggins suggests that perhaps the school district, and not the individual school, is a more appropriate unit of analysis for researchers attempting to delineate the relationship between principal behavior and organizational climate, at least in large urban areas.

In their original investigation, Halpin and Croft suggested that, as time passes, "there may exist an internal generative effect which tends to make an Open Climate become increasingly more open while a Closed Climate becomes increasingly more Closed," as Halpin states. Walden, Taylor, and Watkins made Halpin and Croft's suggestion their main hypothesis in a longitudinal study of elementary school climate.

They also examined the relationship between organizational variables ("change in the principalship, degree of teacher turnover, change in the racial composition of the faculty, change in the racial composition of the student body, and changes in the sizes of schools") and alterations in climate over time.

In 1966, Walden and his colleagues administered the OCDQ to sixty-five elementary school principals and 1,008 teachers in a large school district. In 1971, after desegregation and district reorganization, fifty-five elementary schools (the 1971 total for the district) participated in the follow-up study.

Walden, Taylor, and Watkins discovered that, although school climate changes had taken place from 1966 to 1971, the changes did not confirm their main hypothesis. Only twelve of the fifty-five schools experienced change in the hypothesized direction, and of the thirty-one schools with open climates in 1966, none experienced an intensification of open tendencies. Indeed, the follow-up data showed that twenty-two of these thirty-one schools had closed climate tendencies by 1971. Of the twenty-four schools classed as closed in 1966, twenty remained so, while four moved toward open climate. The researchers concluded that "since the data clearly demonstrated that the schools with open climate tendencies became more closed without exception and the change in the climates for schools with closed climate tendencies could be explained on the basis of chance, the major hypothesis of the study was rejected."

Walden, Taylor, and Watkins believe that "intervening variables, beyond the control of the research and beyond the scope of the study, had a profound impact on organizational climate changes." These intervening variables, such as the political upheaval associated with school desegregation and an acrimonious teachers' strike, were not directly measured by the OCDQ. Indeed, in this study, as in Wiggins' study, the external environment (school district, community) seems to have frustrated the researchers' attempts to attain support for their hypotheses.

### The Pragmatic Approach: How to Cure an Ailing Climate

Practicing educators and administrators tend to view school climate in terms different from those used by researchers such as Halpin and Croft. They are quite understandably more concerned with what to do to improve organizational climate than with precise measurement and description of climate.

The research, frankly, has yet to give practitioners concrete direction for administrative action. Classifying a school's climate as closed, for example, does not tell its principal how to make it more open. And it certainly cannot be very comforting to school administrators to learn that their impact on school climate is minimal, as Wiggins' research indicates. School administrators, like everyone else, need to believe they can influence their environments in a positive and constructive manner.

As a result of the research's seeming inability to tell practitioners what they need to know, a body of pragmatically oriented literature has evolved. School administrators have recounted their schools' successful efforts to improve "climate," though usually they use climate in a rather general way and frequently mean it to be analogous to morale.

These administrator-generated articles definitely accentuate the positive. The administrator, whether superintendent or principal, is viewed as a leader whose actions can shape (and improve) the attitudes of staff, students, and community. The emphasis in most of this literature is on action, rather than on analysis or reflection.

For example, Lindstrom, a California superintendent, urges administrators to "Take some action!" as an antidote to "wringing hands" or "hopelessly staring out your window." Lindstrom follows his initial call to action by listing "six suggestions for

developing a positive organizational climate," which he compiled from "activities that have worked for people in the field":

1. "Rebirth of the organization"—Let the staff know that organizational change is afoot by stating new goals and presenting a plan of action.

2. "Building a history"—Shared experiences among staff members (such as preschool retreats) can establish "a warm glow of comraderie" that will boost morale.

3. "Building trust"—Lindstrom suggests management training exercises to help build trust.

4. "Communications"—Quality, not quantity, is important.

5. "Reinforcement"—Maintain group cohesion through staff meetings with informal, participant-generated agenda.

6. "Pride"—The administrator can involve each participant "in owning a piece of the action" by explicitly commending staff-developed innovations and improvements.

Some attempts have been made to synthesize a research approach to school climate (description, analysis) with the pragmatic, action-oriented approach. One notable example is CFK, Ltd.'s School District Climate Profile and its accompanying recommendations, assembled by Shaheen and Pedrick. The Climate Profile is intended to provide administrators with "a convenient means of assessing the school district's climate factors and determinants."

The four components of the Climate Profile questionnaire are meant to measure general climate factors (such as "respect," "high morale," and "caring"), program determinants (such as "opportunities for active learning," "varied reward systems," and "varied learning environments"), process determinants (such as "improvement of school goals," "effective communication," and "involvement in decision making"), and material determinants ("adequate resources," "supportive and efficient logistical system," and "suitability of school plant").

Shaheen and Pedrick maintain that the superintendent is the most powerful person in the district when it comes to improving organizational climate. Here, as in Lindstrom's article, the administrator is viewed as having more influence over his (or her) environment than (as Wiggins' research suggests) his environment has over him.

The School District Climate Profile differs considerably from Halpin and Croft's OCDQ in its degree of specificity. The profile is intended to measure a broad composite of organizational qualities, including leadership styles, problem-solving and decision-making methods, conflict resolution, interpersonal relations, goal setting, organizational communication, administrator and staff preparation, and so forth. It is obvious that this concept of organizational climate is much more general and all-encompassing than Halpin and Croft's conception of climate. Indeed, climate as described by the School District Climate Profile seems to exemplify the kind of conceptual vagueness that first inspired Halpin and Croft to try to devise a more specific measure of school climate.

For practical purposes, it is difficult to say which measure of climate—the OCDQ or CFK's Profile—is preferable. Both describe, but neither prescribes. Administrators should remember that research has yet to provide evidence of the effectiveness of proposed practical solutions to school climate problems.

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system operated by the National Institute of Education. ERIC serves educators by disseminating research results and other resource information that can be used in developing more effective educational programs. The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, one of several such units in the system, was established at the University of Oregon in 1966. The Clearinghouse and its companion units process research reports and journal articles for announcement in ERIC's index and abstract bulletins.

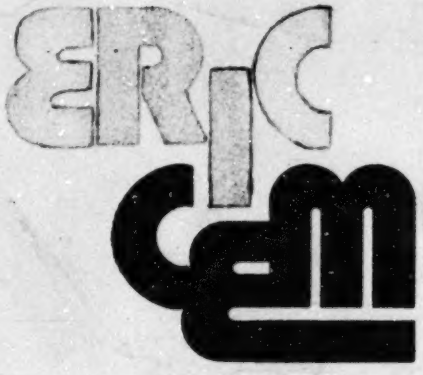
Research reports are announced in Resources in Education (RIE), available in many libraries and by subscription for $42.70 a year from the United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Journal articles are announced in Current Index to Journals in Education. CIJE is also available in many libraries and can be ordered for $62 a year from Macmillan Information, 216R Brown Street, Riverside, New Jersey 08075.

Besides processing documents and journal articles, the Clearinghouse prepares bibliographies, literature reviews, monographs, and other interpretive research studies on topics in its educational area.

This publication was prepared pursuant to a contract with the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Contractors undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgment in professional and technical matters. Prior to publication, the manuscript was submitted to the American Association of School Administrators for critical review and determination of professional competence. This publication has met such standards. Points of view or opinions, however, do not necessarily represent the official view or opinions of either the American Association of School Administrators or the National Institute of Education.

EA 010 197

This Research Action Brief was prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management for distribution by the American Association of School Administrators.




**ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management**
**University of Oregon**
**Eugene, Oregon 97403**